



CARE OF VULVAL SKIN

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the care of vulval skin. It gives general advice for women who have a diagnosed skin condition affecting the vulva or who experience symptoms such as itching or soreness in the genital region.

What is vulval skin?

The vulva is the term used to describe the visible part of the female genitalia. The skin of the vulva is sensitive and can be easily irritated by everyday products that include soap, bubble baths, shower gels, talcum powder, cleansing wipes, perfumes, deodorants and antiseptics, all of which may make your skin sore and uncomfortable.

How should I care for my vulval skin?

- Avoid using irritant products, as listed above, on the vulva
- Do not wash the vulva too often (once a day is usually enough) as this may cause dryness and irritation
- Apply an emollient (moisturising) ointment, cream or lotion regularly

How should I wash my vulva?

Wash your vulva gently, using either your hands or a soft flannel or cloth. Pat the area dry with a soft towel or tissue. If your vulva is inflamed, it is preferable to use an emollient as a substitute for soap.

How should I apply an emollient?

An emollient will moisturise and soothe the vulval skin if it is sore or itchy. A wide range of emollients are available, ranging from greasy products to

creams. Your doctor or chemist may suggest a few for you to try, and you should then choose the one that you prefer. The emollient should be applied directly to your vulval skin with your fingers or a soft flannel, and gently rubbed in. Emollients should be applied as often as you need, and there is no restriction on when and how much to use. They can also be used as a protective barrier prior to passing water or opening your bowels.

When should I apply other treatments?

It is best not to apply your emollient at the same time as other treatments, as this might dilute their effect and risk spreading the treatment preparation to areas that do not require it. Leave an interval of at least 30 minutes between moisturising and applying other treatments.

What are the possible side effects of emollients?

Emollients are unlikely to cause serious side effects unless you are allergic to one of the ingredients, but occasionally they might irritate if you have a sensitive skin, in which case it is worth trying alternative emollients. If your skin condition worsens after using an emollient, or if you develop a rash or experience stinging, stop its use and consult your doctor.

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: its contents, however, may occasionally differ from the advice given to you by your doctor.

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